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## Ordinary management in the Agreste region of confections: A look at the daily life of women business owners in a shopping center

*A gestão ordinária no agreste das confecções: Um olhar a partir do cotidiano das mulheres proprietárias de negócio em um centro de compras*

*La gestión ordinaria en el agreste de las confecciones: Una mirada a la vida cotidiana de las empresarias en un centro comercial*

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The clothing businesses in *agreste* region of Pernambuco originate from street markets and, even after relative modernization, the emergence of large shopping centers and the region's economic prominence, they retain practices based on ordinary management. It is in this context that women build their histories, managing their businesses surrounded by patriarchal relations, sexual division of labor and gender discrimination. In contrast, it is also in this environment that they reaffirm their inclusion, strength and persistence in the search for subsistence and equality in the job market.

**Purpose:** This study sought to analyze the dynamics of ordinary management developed by women who own clothing businesses in a shopping center in the *agreste* region of Pernambuco through a gender perspective.

**Method:** Ten semi-structured interviews were carried out and the findings discussed based on thematic content analysis.

**Results:** It was observed that the owners manage their businesses in a unique way based on the knowledge acquired in practice, without consolidated management tools, but that they are effective in achieving results in an ordinary way of managing; they continue to face the sexual division of labor; overloads of the double work journey; and other gender-related oppressions.

**Conclusions:** The importance of clothing business for the personal and professional lives of these women is perceived, because through work they develop knowledge, gain certain recognition and economic emancipation.

**Keywords:** organizational studies; inclusion; ordinary management; gender; small business.

### RESUMO

**Contextualização:** Os negócios da confecção no *agreste* pernambucano são oriundos das feiras de rua e, mesmo após relativa modernização, surgimento dos grandes centros de compras e alcance de destaque econômico para a região, guardam consigo práticas embasadas na gestão ordinária. É nesse contexto que mulheres constroem suas histórias, gerindo seus negócios cercadas das relações patriarcais, divisão sexual do trabalho e discriminação de gênero. Em contraste, também é nesse ambiente que reafirmam sua inclusão, força e persistência na busca pela subsistência e igualdade no mercado de trabalho.

**Objetivo:** Este estudo buscou analisar as dinâmicas de gestão ordinária desenvolvidas por mulheres que possuem negócios de confecção em um centro de compras no *agreste* pernambucano por meio do recorte de gênero.

**Método:** Foram realizadas dez entrevistas semiestruturadas e os achados discutidos a partir da análise de conteúdo temática.

**Resultados:** Observou-se que as proprietárias administram seus negócios de modo singular a partir do saber adquirido na prática, sem ferramentas de gestão consolidadas, mas que são efetivas em atingir resultados em um modo ordinário próprio de gerir; seguem enfrentando a divisão sexual do trabalho; sobrecargas da dupla jornada laboral; e outras opressões relacionadas ao gênero.

**Conclusões:** Percebe-se importância dos negócios na confecção para a vida pessoal e profissional dessas mulheres, pois a partir do trabalho desenvolvem saberes, conquistam certo reconhecimento e emancipação econômica.

**Palavras-chave:** estudos organizacionais; inclusão; gestão ordinária; gênero; negócios.

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**RESUMEN**

**Contextualización:** Los negocios de ropa en el agreste de Pernambuco tienen su origen en los mercados callejeros y, incluso después de una relativa modernización, el surgimiento de grandes centros comerciales y la prominencia económica de la región, conservan prácticas basadas en una gestión ordinaria. Es en ese contexto que las mujeres construyen sus historias, gestionando sus negocios rodeadas de relaciones patriarcales, división sexual del trabajo y discriminación de género. En cambio, es también en ese entorno donde reafirman su inclusión, fortaleza y persistencia en la búsqueda de la subsistencia y la igualdad en el mercado laboral.

**Objetivo:** Este estudio buscó analizar las dinámicas de gestión ordinarias desarrolladas por mujeres propietarias de negocios de ropa en un centro comercial en la región agreste de Pernambuco a través de una perspectiva de género.

**Método:** Se realizaron diez entrevistas semiestructuradas y se discutieron los hechos a partir del análisis de contenido temático.

**Resultados:** Se observó que las dueñas manejan sus negocios en base a los conocimientos adquiridos en la práctica, sin herramientas de gestión, las cuales son efectivas en la obtención de resultados en la forma ordinaria de gestión; siguen enfrentando la división sexual del trabajo; sobrecargas de doble turno; y otras opresiones de género.

**Conclusiones:** Se percibe la importancia del negocio de la confección para la vida personal y profesional de estas mujeres, ya que a través del trabajo desarrollan conocimientos, obtienen cierto reconocimiento y emancipación económica.

**Palabras clave:** estudios organizacionales; inclusión; gestión ordinaria; género; pequeños negocios.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The way organizations are managed in society began to take shape during the 20th century as a result of the development of administration, legitimizing management as the hegemonic model, aimed at guiding organizations towards efficiency standards to achieve business objectives. In addition to meeting a functionalist vision, which seeks to determine and standardize organizational procedures, this management model disregards the incompatibility with organizational diversity, regarding form, structure, people, control, and history (Alcadipani, 2011; Barros & Carrieri, 2013).

As management theories spread, solutions were sought from managerial practices to address issues related to everyday organizational life. However, even though it was a hegemonic model of organizational management, there existed another form of management, ordinary management, "which deviates from managerial parameters by focusing on the everyday life of the common man [and woman], who manages ordinary business" (Carrieri, Perdigão & Aguiar, 2014, p.699).

Ordinary management encompasses the daily life of small family traders, their established social relationships, their way of organizing business, survival strategies, and the use and meaning of these business and family spaces, as well as the network of relationships woven in these spaces. Daily life would be a context of cultural and social interference where individuals gain voices, elaborate texts, discourses, speak, narrate, and tell their stories, achieving relevance that traditional approaches do not grant them (Carrieri *et al.*, 2014).

Currently, the multiplicity of themes about ordinary management is perceived when discussed in conjunction with enterprises, except for businesses focusing on organized life; the everyday life of the ordinary man/woman, knowledge and symbolic capital; and teaching and research in Administration (Euflausino & Ichikawa, 2021). However, only two studies on ordinary management investigating women are observed. The first, Oliveira *et al.* (2013, p. 36), sought to "contextualize the entrepreneurship of a specific social class, the Brazilian 'ralé'", with confectioners, a snack bar owner, an embroiderer, and a street vendor as participants, but does not address the gender issue. The second, Ribeiro *et al.* (2019, p. 590), "aimed to understand the organization of the mesh of daily practices involving the aesthetics of moves and tactics and strategies of resistance, including infra-political character, through the art of a craftswoman and the actions of a network of women of which she is a part", being the only article that articulates a feminist perspective with ordinary management studies to date.

This reality can be observed in the context of the Pernambuco backlands, where businesses originate from street markets and, even after a relative modernization and the emergence of large shopping centers, strongly retain practices based on ordinary management. Also in this

region, the garment sector emerged in the mid-1960s as a survival alternative for the population suffering from the agricultural crisis resulting from the local drought (Cabral, 2007). Thus, leveraging women's knowledge in sewing, they began to undertake by making clothes from low-cost scraps to sell at the market and generate income (Lira, 2008).

Their formation was articulated through family relationships, as well as neighborhood and friendship, to develop their activities that were originally integrated into domestic work. Initially, the products were destined for popular markets, such as the Sulanca Fair, and, as a result of its expansion and development, they expanded into the industrial garment segment, with the emergence of workshops and factories (Oliveira, 2011).

Taking into account the opportunity to foster the exponential development of garment production, in 2001, the Union of Clothing Industries of the State of Pernambuco (SINVEST) joined a group of local entrepreneurs with the purpose of developing a project for the garment sector, thus beginning the emergence of large shopping centers in the region. Currently, the Pernambuco backlands account for 9% of the national garment production, manufacturing approximately 480 million pieces and boasting 12 thousand companies that generate around 120 thousand direct jobs and 80 thousand indirect ones (Agreste Tex, 2016). It encompasses more than 11 municipalities, with Caruaru, Santa Cruz do Capibaribe, and Toritama being the three most prominent (Lira, 2008).

Integrating the garment triangle of the Pernambuco backlands, the municipality of Caruaru is a significant economic and cultural center of the State of Pernambuco and the region. Commerce is its strongest economic sector, with a focus on garment production, through the well-known "Sulanca Fair." It is in this space that women from the backlands of garment production build their stories, facing the harsh reality of managing their businesses surrounded by patriarchal relations, the sexual division of labor, and gender discrimination. In contrast, it is also in this environment that they reaffirm their inclusion, strength, and persistence in the pursuit of subsistence and equality in the labor market (Prefeitura de Caruaru, 2020; Raposo & Gomes, 2003).

The ability of women to assume high-ranking positions in the hierarchy or to own businesses, both in formal and informal organizations, is always under validation. Women's work is devalued under the pretext of pregnancy and household care, where qualified or high management work is assigned to men, corroborating the sexual division of labor and materializing wage differences between men and women performing the same function (Schwaab, 2019; Acker, 1990). Thus, there is a need to theorize gender in formal organizations and also in ordinary management, which is marked by family relationships with an emphasis on women's work.

According to Brandão (1994), by articulating life and knowledge, women make their voices of redemption and change echo in the network woven by various groups and

organizations. Emphasizing women's work is the key to interpreting reality and the path to women's liberation, as well as a redefinition of development, both in cultural and ethical dimensions and in political, social, and economic ones.

From the context presented, this research aims to analyze the dynamics of ordinary management developed by women who own garment businesses in a shopping center in the Pernambuco backlands through a gender perspective. To achieve this general objective, the scope of this research involved understanding the professional trajectory of women working in this space, as well as analyzing management in ordinary spaces and understanding how gender dynamics are presented among these women business owners. Therefore, it is in this space that the female workforce represents "one of the most important fronts of women's struggle" (Silva, 2016, p.83), and their narratives allow us to interpret reality in this ordinary context marked by family, informal, precarious, and domestic work.

This analysis is important to understand and reflect on the significant role of women and their management practices in organizational daily life, which have greatly contributed to boosting the region's economy. Furthermore, there are few published works relating to the topics covered, especially with the inclusion of non-hegemonic groups. Additionally, studying daily life allows us to investigate and perceive the facts, gestures, and the diversity of interpretations and experiences experienced in the realm of ordinary management, which is based on how individuals understand their contexts and give them meaning (Carrieri *et al.*, 2014).

This research also conforms to the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5), which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The 17 SDGs were agreed upon globally, aiming to practice actions to eradicate poverty, promote equality, and preserve the environment (United Nations - Brazil, 2023). Gender inequality directly affects the Human Development Index (HDI) as promoting empowerment also involves the participation of women in the labor market (Castiblanco Moreno, 2022). Thus, recognizing the space of women business owners in garment production's ordinary management practices and their contribution to gender studies.

This article is structured into six parts; after this introduction, the main aspects of ordinary management and a discussion on gender relations are presented. In the following sections, the methodological procedures, the discussion of the results, and then the final considerations are outlined.

## 2 ORDINARY MANAGEMENT AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Even today, it's necessary to expand the terms management, managing, administering, and to continually challenge them, "because treating management as a

category, not just as a representation, is to start from rules, regulations, structures that impose pre-established standards of knowledge and, ultimately, it's another way of imposing a single worldview." As management becomes inscribed in the field of representation, what matters is managing, organizing, as events that occur in the everyday to be studied (Carrieri *et al.*, 2014, p. 700).

It's essential not to confine the scenario to merely fantastic narratives or those legitimized by possible hegemonic narrators, but rather to "address the history transmitted from the everyday lives of those who do not have prominent roles in the narratives" (Xavier, Barros, Cruz & Carrieri, 2011, p. 41).

For Carrieri *et al.* (2014), the everyday is not a mechanical reproduction of gestures, memories, or folklore to be fixed in a single form. The everyday is a privileged space, the stage for customary needs, constituted by the actions and knowledge of the social groups that share it. It is characterized both individually, as its narrative is built through the day-to-day of their businesses, and collectively, as the business is built with the support and participation of family members, employees, competitors, customers, and others. By observing the common individual, one learns how they manage their own enterprise and projects, as well as the connection with other important dimensions of their life.

Studying the everyday is an investigative space that allows for understanding and questioning about the facts and gestures, the functioning of the family, the significant role of women in this space, and the diversity of interpretations and experiences lived by these individuals of different ethnicities, classes, and genders (Matos, 2002). According to Certeau (2014) and Duran (2007), the everyday is reinvented with a thousand unauthorized ways of hunting, every moment, with each remake of the attitude that man and woman perform in society.

Ordinary management is that which is built in the everyday of ordinary businesses, of small enterprises, and it is a social and cultural exercise constituted by a plurality of codes, references, personal and relational interests. For Guarinello (2004), ordinary management is a clear reaction against the one-dimensional models of the world, a way to reclaim the value of space and its actions in daily life. Consequently, it is not based on hierarchy, structure, formality of relations, or even on the formal procedures of a business. When researching ordinary management:

The small business, the artisan, the street vendor, the shopkeeper, the market vendor were privileged in specific spaces of the city. These transitional spaces between streets, these places of movement, reveal the ambiguities of public spaces: sometimes crowded, with bodies squeezed and a crowd making purchases, looking around, strolling; sometimes used by tribes, specific groups; sometimes empty, abandoned, forgotten (Carrieri *et al.*, 2014, p. 701).

By studying everyday practices, the aim is to capture how individuals perceive their contexts and give them meaning, creating different ways of seeing the world,

allowing for diverse interpretations and meanings (Carrieri *et al.*, 2014).

The central point lies in the routines of people who do not hold relevant positions or functions or who do not belong to the favored classes and parts of society. For these authors, it is about the mundane life of the common individual, not extraordinary matters like the strategies of leaders and executives. The intention is not to generalize the management of everyday life but to examine how this management functions, what it can produce, what knowledge and practices it generates that contribute to the survival of enterprises and families (Carrieri, Perdigão, Martins & Aguiar, 2018).

In the organizational space, old ideas gain strength, and individuals use them, transforming them into new forms, new meanings, thus developing their own managerial practices. Thus, in the management of organizations, there is a diversified phenomenon that includes its participants and the less remembered people. These individuals create and make use of so-called folk knowledge, with their own practices of organizing activities in their small-scale commercial enterprises (Carrieri *et al.*, 2018). Understanding ordinary management can assist in creating innovations for these businesses (Silva *et al.*, 2021).

Therefore, by recounting the practices of individuals, one is also describing their individual experiences, actions, solidarity, and struggles, which constitute the space in which they construct cultural and identity meanings (Carrieri *et al.*, 2014). Given the scenario outlined, the importance of studying the daily lives of women business owners in the Pernambuco backlands is emphasized, giving voice to these managers who have long been marginalized, made invisible, and excluded from historical processes.

### **3 WOMEN IN THE GARMENT-PRODUCING BACKLANDS AND THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOR**

In Brazil and worldwide, women's labor force has been essential for the development of the garment industry (Bezerra, 2011). Both in the formal sector and in the informal economy, "women's participation in the labor market is growing, and there has been greater access to education in recent decades" (Melo & Castilho, 2009, p.139).

However, research on gender indicates that women's work is marked by wage inequalities, precarious health and work environment conditions, as well as the accumulation of domestic work, making women even more susceptible to part-time or informal work, performing the most precarious and unstable activities, especially in the informal market, characterized as a sector that does not guarantee rights to workers (Almeida, Costa & Helal, 2016; Hirata, 2002). Often disguised as entrepreneurship, self-employment, or freelance work.

In the backlands of garment production in the Pernambuco region, sewing was initially an alternative to agricultural work that enabled women to ensure some purchasing power (Milanês, 2015, p.88), and today they

play various roles, whether as business owners, managers, or directly involved in factory floor operations (Souza & Silva, 2021; Souza *et al.*, 2023).

The work performed by women not only represented a monetary gain, but also "a sense of independence and also ends up breaking the financial subjection that some of them could have in relation to their husbands or parents" (Milanês, 2015, p.120). Although they have achieved some gains in the backlands of Pernambuco, between inclusion and affirmation, they still need to traverse a difficult path of struggle against patriarchal relations and the sexual division of labor.

The sexual division of labor can be thought of in two aspects. Firstly, it discusses the position of men and women in the labor market, trades, and professions, as well as changes in the time and space of these positions. Secondly, it exposes that the inequalities are systematic and emphasizes that society manipulates this differentiation to hierarchize activities, thus creating a gender system, consisting of meanings and practices that are shaped according to different types of societies and their historical moment, but still maintain the devaluation of work performed by women in relation to work performed by men (Carloto, 2002).

This division condition represents the mode of segmentation of social work resulting from the relations between sexes and is characterized by assigning men activities related to the productive sphere and women activities directed to the reproductive sphere. It is composed of two organizing principles: the principle of separation, which underlies the existence of men's work and women's work; and the hierarchical principle, which emphasizes the valorization of male work over female work, meaning that men's work is more valuable than women's work. The validation of these principles transcends time and space, being present in various societies (Hirata & Kergoat, 2007; Sígolo, 2021).

This model is historically and socially articulated (Saffioti, 1976) and directs women to act as housewives, wives, mothers, and reproducers, so work at home is the most reconcilable with traditional roles (Carloto, 2002).

It is worth adding that this "direction" towards reproductive activities for women from the middle layers of society to subordinate occupations, poorly paid and with no promotion prospects (Saffioti, 1976), "in addition to falling on them a large part of the household chores", with men being assigned functions of greater social value (Bruschini *et al.*, 2011, p.143).

For women, employment has the function of participating in common life, meaning the ability to build it and feel less insecure in everyday life, but the unconscious fear of failure and criticism directed at the fact that women are "out of the house", from what is said to be their "natural" place, results in women seeking to integrate into the class structure through paths of least resistance, socially defined as suitable for the characteristics of their gender, that is, performing poorly paid activities, which confer little prestige

and are judged inadequate for men (Saffioti, 1976; Carloto, 2002; Guimarães 2021).

Even though considered as a source of equity, occupational activity cannot be thought of as the exclusive source of balance for women because "their workforce is sometimes put on the market as a commodity to be exchanged, sometimes put in the home". Both roles placed by society are complex and have led many women to give up possible professional fulfillment in favor of greater integration into the family group. In this scenario, women are positioned to hierarchize the functions they perform, placing their professional activities in the background, when "in reality, from the standpoint of their integration into society, both should be placed on an equal footing" (Saffioti, 1976, pp.43-44).

In seeking to break away from patriarchy and the sexual division of labor, for some women, "entrepreneurship" becomes an alternative to reduce inequalities, generate income, purchasing power, and autonomy to manage their own finances (Furno, 2015; Souza *et al.*, 2023). In the studied region, for example, it was possible to notice the growth of Individual Microentrepreneurs (MEI) and Microenterprises (ME) and the intense presence of women in the "retail trade of clothing and accessories," representing 75% of this segment (Pereira, 2015). The very establishment of garment manufacturing, at the beginning of productive activities in the region, occurred without state support or mediation, whose development may have become possible due to the entrepreneurship of women and men in unfavorable financial conditions who saw this segment as a means of survival (Ávila, Ferreira & Arantes 2015).

However, studies on entrepreneurship lack a critical perspective, do not problematize the unequal distribution of power between men and women, and attribute to women a unique style of management that reproduces gender biases. In this sense, "works that emphasize the differences between genders to explain the innovative potential of women entering the labor market as entrepreneurs" are still common (Figueiredo *et al.*, 2015, p. 112). Although in another field, one could paraphrase Figueiredo *et al.* (2015) and infer that the practices of garment manufacturing in the backlands of Pernambuco bring in their context specific issues of street market logic (Sá, 2018) and the traditional sexual and social division of labor (Hirata, 2002; Souza *et al.*, 2023), leading one to believe that understanding such practices using female entrepreneurship literature is a contradiction in terms.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the "reality of the social phenomenon practiced in everyday management lacks theoretical perceptions peculiar to its practice." It is observed that even conventional theories on entrepreneurship aimed at small businesses still diverge from the management reality that occurs in the day-to-day operations of many businesses (Euflausino & Ichikawab, 2022, p. 583). Therefore, it was chosen to give greater

emphasis to the theoretical lens of ordinary management and the sexual division of labor at the expense of entrepreneurship literature in this study. Additionally, there is a need to better understand ordinary management and gender issues in the context of women who own small businesses.

#### 4 METHODOLOGY

This study has a descriptive and qualitative nature, as it corresponds to a deeper space of relationships, reflecting the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes (Minayo, 2002). It aims to explore, understand, and explain the meanings that individuals or groups attribute to a human social problem, describing the characteristics of the phenomenon analyzed and establishing relationships among the proposed variables (Creswell, 2010).

The findings were collected through semi-structured interviews with female shop owners who have businesses in a shopping center in the agreste region of Pernambuco. Their selection was based on the availability of the interviewees upon initial contact, the size of their businesses (small shops), and the number of employees working in the enterprises, up to two. The interview script was structured into four parts: 1) the profile of the interviewees; 2) work routines; 3) how women organize and manage their businesses; and 4) gender issues.

In this study, the interviews were conducted by phone, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, recorded using a voice recording app, and lasted between thirty minutes and two hours. Ten women who own stores in the shopping center were interviewed, and they previously authorized the recording of their speech and were informed of the research objectives.

Regarding the limitations of data collection for the study, it is worth mentioning the limited availability of time from the interviewees, external noise in the interviewer's and interviewees' environment at times, and internet connection disruptions. However, these aspects did not compromise the quality of the activity.

The analysis of the findings was conducted using the content analysis technique (Bardin, 2000), which approaches data through systematic procedures. Thus, the thematic content analysis was performed, constructed from a priori categories according to the subdivisions described in the interview script and addressed during interactions with the participants. The content of the messages was examined beyond the immediate meaning to develop an understanding of the speech obtained in the interviews (Schivani, 2018), investigating the meanings of the management practiced by the interviewed female shop owners within their work routines and how gender issues interfere with these processes.

## 5 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This section is structured into three parts. First, the profile, professional trajectory, and other aspects of the interviewees' work are presented. Next, aspects of ordinary management in garment making are discussed. Finally, the discussion revolves around the "being a woman" in garment making based on gender relations and the sexual division of labor.

### 5.1 Profile, trajectory, and work of business owners

The 10 interviewees range in age from 21 to 58 years old and have different marital statuses: five are single, three are divorced, and two are married. Regarding education, two have completed higher education, one in physical education and one in administration; one interviewee has incomplete higher education in nutrition; and one is completing a degree in pharmacy. Four have completed high school, and two have incomplete high school. Here is an excerpt from the interviews that corroborates this information.

Because it's a very common thing in my city, right. Caruaru, here in the Northeast, clothing manufacturing is a very strong thing, you know. So when you don't study, don't go to university, and you lean towards this professional thing [...], you have to go towards sewing. So since I started sewing at a very young age, I already had a lot of sewing experience. Then you combine everything, and thank God it turned out quite well! (Interviewee 2)

These findings are validated by Hirata (2002), who discusses an increase in women's educational attainment, but also notes an increase in outsourced, part-time, precarious, and informal work, maintaining the division of labor by gender.

However, comparing the level of education of men working in clothing manufacturing in this locality (Souza *et al.*, 2020), these women have a higher average years of schooling than them. This aspect is also aligned with the higher level of schooling among women in Brazil (Bruschini *et al.*, 2011; Melo; Castilho, 2009), although there are differences between regions of the country. In the agreste region of Pernambuco, this occurs even though most began their work journey during childhood in family businesses, balancing domestic activities alongside studies and work. On the other hand, it is observed that six of the interviewees did not have access to university or vocational courses in the field, corroborating Carrieri (2012) and Oliveira *et al.* (2013), who point out that excluded from access to formal education, the paths taken by ordinary managers to manage their businesses are not the result of academic knowledge or manuals of top executives, but are based on their life experiences.

Four interviewees do not have children; two have two children aged between 19 and 32 years old; two mentioned having one child each aged 16 and 25 years old; one interviewee is pregnant with her first child; and one is a

mother of three children aged between 23 and 30 years old. Among those who are mothers, the daily struggle and difficulties in balancing paid work with caring for their children were emphasized before becoming owners of the stores in the shopping center, as pointed out by one interviewee:

I confess to you that it was very difficult. To work, I had to take my daughter with me, so I had to work as a domestic worker. Yes, as a nanny, where people allowed me to take her, you know. So she was always with me all the time. Then it became more complicated when I changed jobs, so I had to put her in a private school, where I could afford it with the little I earned. She stayed there full time until I finished work at 8 o'clock in the evening and picked her up and took her home. I bought food for my daughter and drank water, so my daughter doesn't know what it's like to go hungry. I had lunch at work because the boss provided the food, and I took advantage and ate a lot so that I wouldn't feel hungry at other times, to have more left for her. [...] So then, I created an extreme strength within me [...] and went into battle. So, I have never had a day off in my life, never had a day off since I set my mind to succeed so that my daughter wouldn't suffer like I did. (Interviewee 10)

This challenge is even stronger because the societal division of labor imposes almost exclusively on women the responsibility for reproductive activities, such as caring for children, the household, and the family (Saffioti, 1976; Hirata; Kergoat, 2007; Carloto, 2002). When they have support to balance paid work with childcare, it is based on the support network of other women in the family, as emphasized by one interviewee: "I had a lot of support from my grandmother and my mother-in-law, [...] it was really within the family that I had this support" (Interviewee 1). This daily reality corroborates Kergoat's argument (2010) when she points out that the domestic work undertaken by women allows men to invest in their careers, leaving women with higher incomes to transfer domestic work to other women.

Seen as synonymous with motherhood and overwhelmed with multiple roles, the support network becomes a fundamental factor for women. Even with the right to maternity leave, after this period they return to the workplace and need to rely on informal networks, usually consisting of family members, as they face a series of challenges in balancing so many responsibilities (Manente & Rodrigues, 2016; Souza & Silva, 2021; Souza *et al.*, 2023). Such networks also express a form of resistance insofar as they involve struggles for economic and gender justice (Ribeiro *et al.*, 2019); in the studied context, they contribute to women being able to dedicate themselves to productive work and, consequently, achieve some financial emancipation.

The majority of the business owners interviewed started working in childhood. Some even performed household chores and helped with sales in family-owned stores and clothing stalls at fairs, occupations that, along with sewing, stood out as the first jobs in the trajectory of these professionals. The family also played an active role in

shaping these women, who learned the trade from the practical knowledge passed down among their relatives and did not attend vocational training courses in the field. This legitimizes the argument that family-type relationships constituted the basis of production, marketing, and development in the clothing industry in the agreste of Pernambuco (Véras de Oliveira, 2011) and the daily life of ordinary management (Carrieri *et al.*, 2014). In addition, practical knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation (Souza *et al.*, 2020).

I have been working since I was 15 years old, I started at the Caruaru market. In fact, I am still at the market today. I started at the market, then I had to leave the market, and then I started working at [the shopping center], in a different store from mine. After that, I worked at a transportation company, spent two years there, then I returned to the market again. I think 'a good child returns home,' so I worked at the market, and I am still there today. I have my store, but I balance my store between the store and the market nowadays. I can't leave the market because I have many good results from there. It's where I discovered myself, you know. (Interviewee 4)

The interviewees have been in business at the shopping center for an average of 13.9 years, with the shortest time being 1 year and 6 months and the longest time in the market being 16 years. They sell products such as women's and men's clothing, children's clothing, lingerie, jeans, and accessories. Three of them manufacture the pieces they sell, also participating in the production process; one is a subcontractor, meaning she outsources the production process but is responsible for its management, purchasing inputs, etc.; and the others sell products from third parties.

The activity in the garment industry is pointed out by the owners not only as a source of income but also as a source of satisfaction and personal fulfillment, as in the speech below:

I think working with clothing manufacturing completes me. It's not just a way to make money, but also a source of pleasure. It makes me feel fulfilled with what I do, you know? Just having your product there because I choose a lot of prints, you see. And knowing that my customer liked what I chose [...] is really cool for me. (Interviewee 7)

It is observed that the premise of these businesses differs from others. Here, the idea of entrepreneurship is in a context of social exclusion and struggle, as issues related to social mobility, obtaining legitimacy, and better living conditions are equally fundamental (Carrieri, 2012; Oliveira *et al.*, 2013).

The work journey of the interviewed women is quite intense. They work from Sunday to Sunday in their shops in the shopping center, whose opening hours are from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm. However, such a journey goes beyond business hours, as in addition to business-related activities such as cutting pieces, responding to messages, placing orders, or

coordinating activities, when they return home they still perform domestic tasks, take care of children and family.

I wake up at 5 o'clock in the morning to take care of the animals [...]. I put the coffee on the stove, then I have coffee, make my daughter's lunch. At 8 o'clock, I leave home, go to work, don't even leave the store to have lunch, I order my lunch and the boy brings it to the store. I only leave to go to the bathroom and to go home at 7 in the evening. This is from Monday to Sunday. I only have a day off on December 25th, on New Year's Eve, and on the Day of the Salesperson, because it's forbidden to open, that's it. (Interviewee 10)

Five of the interviewees have cleaners to help with household chores biweekly. Four do the activities alone, and only one has a full-time housekeeper.

Regarding family support, two interviewees share this responsibility with their spouse, four bear all household expenses alone, two share this responsibility with their partner, and two others share this commitment with their parents. Furthermore, five women have another source of income, such as being a partner in a clothing manufacturing company, owning a store in another shopping center, running a handicraft store, and working as a caregiver in a shelter.

## 5.2 Ordinary management in the clothing business

The owners manage their businesses alone: "It's all me, you know, and the girls who work with me help a little, they're wonderful, but everything, everything, is me" (Interviewee 2). And they perform managerial functions that involve organizing and monitoring the business's development, purchasing raw materials or items, setting prices for goods, and organizing displays, among other activities.

Yeah, actually, we do a bit of everything because we're the ones who buy, we also organize the store, yeah, setting prices is also up to us, yeah, organizing the store in terms of not just putting everything in the right place, but also choosing the displays, everything, it's us who organize it (Interviewee 6).

Financial management, cash control, etc. are also the responsibility of the owners: "This financial, administrative part, everything, it's all me, only the sales part is handled by the girls, just the sales part, but the administrative, financial, everything, I do" (Interviewee 7). However, they do not execute long-term spending planning; thus, many make payments on a weekly basis, meaning they use the money that comes into the cash register during the weekend and pay throughout the week.

In the store, seven of the owners have between one and two employees. The others work alone in the operation, and when they need to travel, organize some household tasks, or deal with personal matters, they hire a cleaner. The same applies to festive times of the year, which generate a higher number of sales, requiring the hiring of a cleaner.

Likewise, there is no custom of stocking materials or products due to the seasonality of the prints that change due to yearly trends: "We buy just enough, because nowadays,

we can't stock too much, because we don't know how the sales of that knitwear will go." (Interviewee 9). As a result, they buy and sell new pieces in a shorter period, weekly or biweekly.

Most of the interviewees use social media to create and execute marketing actions for their business, with Instagram, Facebook, and mainly WhatsApp being the most used platforms to boost the promotion of goods.

Well, regarding marketing, I use Instagram and Facebook a lot, thank God it has been very successful because every promotion always has comments, likes, and that engages a lot, and thank God I sell a lot through WhatsApp, with photos, I make videos, you know, I believe that showing your daily life, showing you buying the merchandise, also keeps the customer more informed about what they are buying, about the quality (Interviewee 4).

It is worth noting, as research results, that it was through social media that the shop owners were able to continue trading their pieces at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic since the shopping center had to be closed for a few months. With this, they reinvented themselves, changed their strategies according to the needs, and continued selling mainly to loyal customers.

We had to bring almost all the merchandise here to my house because it stayed closed for almost five months. And from here, we were taking photos to send to customers, to post online, and so we were hustling because if we were to wait five months to get back to normal, I don't know how our situation would be because it was tough.

They pointed out the difficulty in using websites or other digital platforms because they work with a variety of prints, "so when we have to put all the prints for you to choose, it's a very complicated thing, as we work with cheap items, so we can't spend too much time on it, you know" (Interviewee 1), in addition to the lack of knowledge in other technological tools.

Selling online is something that's very interesting, but there are still many tools missing, you know, a lot is lacking for us to achieve this because in the garment industry, it's very difficult, it's easier to sell online when you're selling objects, utensils, those kinds of things you can manage, but clothing is complicated to sell" (Interviewee 2).

Some strategies were noticed during the analysis of the interviews and are used by business owners to stay in the market, as shown in the table below:

**Table 1**  
Strategies Used by the Shop Owners

Used Strategies	Interviewees
Constant innovation of pieces	I seek to stay informed, always innovating with a new design, you know, sometimes I use the work of a pattern maker, adjusting it to my reality, it's about creativity. "They like to copy, I don't like that. I like to innovate, I like to be different. I don't like to be like anyone else, selling what the neighbor sells" (Interviewee 7).
Competitive pricing	"Always with new items to beat even my own competitors. And strategizing on pricing, because when you have new merchandise that's catching attention and at a good price, then you'll always be selling" (Interviewee 10).
Good customer service	"I believe that if you have good customer service, you have almost 90% of your business. If you at least have a passion for what you do, you will stay in the market" (Interviewee 3).
Offering higher quality products	"My dilemma is always having something good, always having something simpler, but also something good, where that person stops to see the simple, but also sees the best, you know, so like that, and at a price that fits people's pockets" (Interviewee 10).
Innovation in marketing models	"I reinvented myself because before I used to make my pieces and sell them at retail and it didn't give much to sell wholesale [...], but now after the pandemic I had to reinvent myself, I had to make pieces more for commercial use, for people's everyday life" (Interviewee 2).

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Thus, the business is conducted from a new perspective, adapting to the new situations of the local trade and market, a aspect that reaffirms Carrieri *et al.*'s argument (2014) when they emphasize that the context of the enterprises allows the emergence of new strategies and tactics, because, by studying the everyday life, it is perceived that some of them are appropriate and others are not. Having a financial reserve for emergency situations and maintaining a good relationship with already loyal customers were also employed strategies and pointed out as important to deal with the adversity of the pandemic.

Regarding the registration of the cash flow of the stores, seven of the interviewed women declared that they carry out financial monitoring daily and manually, based on their experiences and knowledge developed over the years acting as merchants: "we work on that tight thing, by a

natural thing of being a merchant, of being born into it, you know. We know how to calculate costs and manage that value" (Interviewee 1). Thus, they organize their management activities guided by the said popular knowledge, which rescues their previous knowledge and underlies the creation of their own practices for the daily conduct of the business (Carrieri *et al.*, 2018).

The cash flow statement is executed only physically using notebooks, notes, scraps, agendas, notebooks, or cash book: "it's in a notebook, all sales are there, everything that is paid is there, you know [...], it's all by eye, we have control of everything that comes in cash and everything that comes in card" (Interviewee 9). Or "we just use the notes, the cash book and we have control of the card machine that we use, then we control the cash and the money that comes in on the card" (Interviewee 3), a characteristic aspect of the

trade originating from street fairs, which has its commercialization based on the local and customary logic (Paiva, Sá & Souza, 2018). Only two of the interviewees operate spreadsheets in Excel and another uses a mixed system with spreadsheet and also notebooks to record the amount.

Advantages and disadvantages were considered in operating this type of business. As for the advantages, there was emphasis on the importance of being the owner of the venture, facing the freedom to organize their own time and hours of work in managing the business based on the daily events: "in my case, the advantage is being the owner of my own business, right. Having control over things, aiming for a better future" (Interviewee 3). "The advantage, at least in my view, is because we work for ourselves, you know, we don't have a boss. So we do it the way we think is best" (Interviewee 6).

The rapid financial return and the opportunity for growth in the local market were also mentioned as advantageous points: "having your own business gives you more conditions to invest, to want to grow, regardless of your point of view, right" (Interviewee 7).

As for the disadvantages, while the owners highlighted the power to decide how many hours to work per day as an advantage, they also highlight this condition as one of the main disadvantages in this type of business, as they end up working even more: "you work double, you know, you work for two or three people at the same time" (Interviewee 7). Thus, these women end up having less time for themselves, since most of them, even being at home in the evening, would still be on the production line, solving issues related to work and while performing domestic and/or childcare functions.

The constant innovation of the products was also pointed out as a disadvantage because it is necessary to always have capital to replace the pieces: "you have to always have money to replace, otherwise you fall behind, your competitor overtakes you" (Interviewee 10). These women are inserted in a transforming context that moves towards dominant managerial models, which aim to unify organizational management. In these terms, Carrieri *et al.* (2014) point out that ordinary management is one conceived in the daily life of small enterprises, which present instantaneous, lasting, incisive, or repetitive characteristics in their foundation.

Thus, they allow these managers active in the clothing manufacturing to build their own way of managing their businesses. They learn day by day and, based on their intuition and their own knowledge, develop their management dynamics guided by a perspective of the typical street market of the agreste region of Pernambuco and of clothing manufacturing.

### 5.3 The "being a woman" in clothing manufacturing: Gender and sexual division of labor

Although the tiredness generated by the intense workload was mentioned by the women, there was also

evidence of a feeling of satisfaction and personal fulfillment in working with what they love, being the owners of their own businesses, and achieving financial independence to make their own decisions. As reported below: "I feel tired, but satisfied, fulfilled knowing that I am working on something for myself, not out of obligation, but because I really like it, that's it" (Interviewee 6), "I feel like this, tired, because the journey is long, but happy, because regardless of how much you sell, you feel very fulfilled with everything I have achieved" (Interviewee 4).

It is worth noting the extent to which achieving financial independence is rewarding for them: "it is very gratifying to work, to have your own things, financial independence is very gratifying, especially for us women" (Interviewee 4). Work in clothing manufacturing validates the purchasing power and financial management of these women and, in line with Milanês (2015), based on their economic independence, they can decide how and where to use the money earned, interrupting the cycle of monetary subjugation to their partners or parents: "there is nothing worse than depending on someone, this thing of giving me 10 reais to buy underwear. 'For what? Give me 10 reais, for what?' This 'for what' kills me" (Interviewee 4). In a scenario of difficulty in acquiring qualifications that leads to unemployment or underemployment, having their own business, for these women, emerges as a matter of survival (Carrieri, 2012; Oliveira *et al.*, 2013; Souza *et al.*, 2023) and a certain emancipation, even if merely financial.

The sexual division of labor imposed by patriarchal society becomes evident when women report feeling overwhelmed by having to perform all household tasks alone and being unable to share them with their male family members:

I'm feeling very overwhelmed as a woman, and I make every effort for the men around me [...], we get home, then I have to make dinner, then a child comes and says: 'what's for dinner today?' as if we were a menu, you know [...]. I get very angry, you know, about not sharing household chores, you wash your clothes, you sweep the house, you clean the bathroom, I've tried, but I can't, and that's all weighing on me at night when I lie down, it's very heavy for me. (Interviewee 2)

This sexist daily life experienced by women in the garment industry in the agreste region of Pernambuco corroborates a national (Neves & Pedrosa, 2007) and global reality (Hirata & Kergoat, 2007).

The owners cannot see differences regarding the comparison of their businesses with those of men, demonstrating that they perceive some form of equity in this regard, and the shopping center being a space of opportunity for those who want to venture into garment making: "No, I don't think so, there are many women who have done very well there, right. I think [the shopping center] is more for women than men. It's more feminine there, right?" (Interviewee 9).

However, concerning social relations, elements of the sexual division of labor were identified in the research and

pointed out by them at other times during the interview, especially regarding the non-sharing of household chores. This aspect provides a greater workload for women, requiring more physical and mental effort. In addition to the need for the existence of a support network and solidarity among these women to reconcile the routine of the business and home (Fernandes, 2021; Souza *et al.*, 2023). This daily struggle to ensure their space in business allows, paraphrasing Godinho (2016), women to build their channels of expression, create their destinies, and sow paths for future generations, thus climbing steps towards gender equality.

## 6 FINAL REMARKS

This study analyzed the dynamics of ordinary management developed by women who own clothing businesses in a shopping center in the agreste region of Pernambuco, focusing on gender. By observing these women actively working in the ordinary environment of clothing production, one can perceive how they manage and balance their businesses with other spheres of their lives.

It was identified that the women interviewed have, on average, a higher level of education than men working in clothing production, even though most of them started their work journey during childhood in family businesses, while also performing domestic tasks simultaneously. This circumstance demonstrates the resilience and struggle that women face in their daily lives throughout their lives.

The early occupation of women in clothing production significantly contributed to the development of their businesses, directing them to this area of activity, as many of the interviewees were influenced by family members who work or have worked in this type of business, and they were able to identify opportunities that arose in their daily lives, such as acquiring a store/booth in the shopping center where they operate.

Even though they are part of a supposedly modern shopping center with more sophisticated processes of external and internal interactions, these women organize their businesses independently, in an informal and customary manner, characteristics of ordinary management.

Based on their life experiences, they perform business administrative activities such as making purchases, arranging products in the store, setting prices, organizing the store internally and externally, dividing tasks between themselves and their employees, managing overtime hours, making deliveries of purchases made via WhatsApp, promoting products on social media, calculating and settling fixed and variable expenses, and, above all, recording the store's cash flow, which is done manually, using agendas and notebooks.

They use various strategies in their daily lives, such as constantly innovating the products offered, paying attention to market trends, maintaining competitive prices,

and offering differentiated quality in customer service. Often guided by needs, circumstances, and daily situations.

Thus, it can be observed that the owners manage their businesses in a unique way based on a practical knowledge acquired without consolidated management tools, but which are effective in achieving results through their own ordinary way of managing, inherited from a logic of street markets very present in the region.

Although the burden of double work and fatigue at the end of each day were mentioned, the women emphasized that through work they feel fulfilled and, by doing what they love, they feel useful, strong, and proud to have achieved financial independence through their own work. Such a role in clothing businesses allowed for the economic emancipation of these women from Pernambuco.

The importance of work in the lives of these women and so many others who face their daily struggles and difficulties in this diverse ordinary environment, a stage for new knowledge and also for female empowerment, can be perceived. Therefore, they seek to grow financially, develop their knowledge, contribute, and aspire to be recognized by society as producers of knowledge in the past and present. Consisting of a process of daily construction and recognition, it is known that there are still many struggles to be overcome, such as the eradication of the sexual division of labor and patriarchy in local social relations.

Consequently, as a contribution of this study, it can be suggested to direct research to portray the experiences of ordinary people with a focus on minorities such as women, blacks, indigenous people, etc., both in the invisibility in which society refers to them and in the positions and places they hold. Another line of research that can be pursued is investigations that explore facets in the context of ordinary management together with a critical perspective on female entrepreneurship.

Thus, it is important to continue researching these topics. The present study can be expanded to other segments for comparison purposes and to seek to understand the daily lives of men and women regarding ordinary management and their views on gender dynamics in clothing production, or even to focus on other non-hegemonic groups such as blacks or indigenous people.

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